

The Commission of 1905-9, of which Mrs Webb was a member—indeed, *the* member, both so far as the Commission, at the time, and the public, then, and later, were concerned—was set up by Mr Balfour on the eve of the General Election of 1906, which swept his Party out of power for the next sixteen years. The reason for its appointment, as its historians point out, was certainly not any general interest in, or even dissatisfaction with, the Poor Laws. There was no such general interest, at the time. On the other hand, that great social problem had begun to take menacing forms which we recognise as the characteristic challenging question-mark to our existing economic order. Unemployment was not, in 1905, as serious as it was to become, by the time that the Commission reported, but it was serious enough to have forced the Balfour Government to pass the Unemployed Workman Act of 1905, enabling local authorities to set up relief works. This policy alarmed the orthodox, and not least those who sensed the Webb mind behind Labour pressure in the House of Commons. There were not a few, inside parliament and out, who believed that that same mind had had no small share in bringing about the appointment of the Royal Commission. Arthur Balfour was an intimate in Grosvenor Road. Gerald Balfour, his brother, was in the key position, as President of the Local Government Board, and he, too, had had long talks there. Those who knew,

or guessed,
the history of the origins of the Education Acts
of 1902-3,
now saw the same tactic at work It was no
secret that
the partners, on any great social question,
desired nothing
so much as a "grand inquisition" into "the
facts"⁵⁵ If
it could be public, so much the better If
the enemy
could be made to do it, better still No
enquiry could
reveal so many facts of the kind which, as
Charles Booth's
famous Enquiry proved, create and mould
opinion, as